

113, 248, 288, 439, 442

Greece EHI

[For information on agriculture, imports and exports, the textile industry and cotton production in Greece from a report published in 1952 by The National Cotton Council of America entitled "Cotton In The Middle East", see category 116, M1 Middle East, 29: Dunn, pp. 163-182.]

Religion and the Greek Peasant

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So the bishop arranged for nuns at a convent on the edge of town to teach some of the girls to spin and weave silk. For two hundred years the nuns of this convent have been leaders in the silk industry. In 1770, under the Turks, the nuns with their abbess were exiled to Constantinople, went to Broussa, and learned the manipulation of silk. Later, when they were able to come back to Kalamata, they brought with them the silkworm eggs and started the silk industry. Many local girls come to the convent to learn how to carry on silkworm production and weaving on a simple loom at home. So, the bishop thought, these same nuns would be able to teach these orphan girls the silk industry, and many other things as well. When we visited the convent, eighteen girls were living there, but buildings were nearing completion which would accommodate up to fifty girls. Queen Frederika had come to help dedicate the cornerstones. But the nuns were anxious to show us where they produced the fine silk cloth we had been admiring. It was a strange experience to go with the nuns into the big room full of textile machines and to see the dexterity with which these women clad in medieval garments managed the complex machinery, even to the point of making many mechanical repairs.

One institution which the bishop showed us with evident pride was a tuberculosis sanatorium. To reach it we had to ride from his palace through the town to a mountain a few miles distant. We could not help notice the people's affection for the bishop: men, upon seeing him, would take off their hats and women would cross themselves. Some of this, we knew, was done because he was a bishop and thus due a certain amount of reverence, but the expression of warmth on the faces of the people indicated their genuine appreciation of what the bishop was doing for them.

When we arrived at the sanatorium, the bishop explained: "Why should a few old monks have such a beautiful site to live in when tuberculosis was proving such a scourge to so many people? I told the monks they could go pray somewhere else and that we would make this into a sanatorium." Of course, the bishop admitted that he was oversimplifying the problem a bit, for even the Greek Orthodox Church has its red tape. In any event, he had succeeded in getting about twenty patients out into this healthful spot under proper care. One of the first things he did upon our arrival was to go check the menu posted in the kitchen, for he takes a personal interest in what is being served to the patients.

While at the sanatorium we noticed a number of donkeys tied outside and many peasant men and women sitting at the door of the little church dedicated to St. Elijah. We learned that many of these peasants had come quite far on this Sunday and had brought gifts of food and oil to the sanatorium as *psychiko*, a word which comes from Byzantine times and means property donated to monasteries or churches by pious pilgrims for the salvation of their souls. These peasants proved a lighthearted group, probably

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Social Change in Rural Greece

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tions to their homeland. Enough time had passed to enable many of them to assess the impact of their encounter with Greek national life, for numerous changes had followed their arrival.

Their resettlement had, in the first place, brought about a national unity not heretofore possible, since Turks and Bulgarians had left Greece (with the exception of the Turks in western Thrace who were permitted to remain because Greeks were allowed to stay in Istanbul), and the Greeks from Asia Minor were now collected in metropolitan Greece. With the exception of Cyprus and perhaps northern Epirus, there was now little ground for irredentism, which has so consistently plagued each of the Balkan states since their creation as independent political units.

A second effect of the refugees' arrival was the improvement of agriculture, especially in Northern Greece, where the refugees chiefly settled, as well as in Crete, where they improved the vineyards. Because they had been uprooted, the newcomers were much more ready to adopt modern farming methods, to use fertilizer and improved seed. They even introduced new crops to the mainland of Greece. This readiness for change at times contrasted sharply with the more apathetic and conservative native villagers.

The refugees, in the third place, helped create a public health service. Many of them settled in the marshy deltas of the rivers emptying into the Aegean Sea, where malaria — to which they had developed no immunity in Asia Minor — wiped out whole villages. Being desperate, they cooperated to the fullest with authorities who were draining the swamps and insulating malaria-control measures.

Even more important was the refugees' role in creating new industries, such as rug weaving, especially in urban centers. They brought in skills, including entrepreneurial ability; even the untrained represented a willing labor pool. They had to rely on their wit and skill to survive in this new environment. The same held true for the fishing industry, which at best was at a primitive level in Greece before the coming of the refugees.

One nomarch, long-familiar with the refugee problem, summarized his observations as follows:

At the time of their coming, we looked upon these refugees as a terrible burden. But they did bring a creative and civilized element. Here in Macedonia, the refugees are a progressive element: in industry, commerce, and agriculture. They are progressive because they have had so many hardships that they are like iron which has gone through fire and become more malleable. Most of the refugees think they have a better life here than they had in their former homes.

This cataclysmic event, resulting from the disastrous Asia Minor campaign by the Greeks, brought not only a large population increase; it also introduced a social transfusion which all observers agree led to a more progressive spirit in Greece.

[Hill Villages]
THE VILLAGES

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621 Ten men in the village had come back after serving with the
669 guerrillas, and were kept under informal surveillance. Some
727 forty others had not returned, and most of these were presumed
dead. Thirteen who had retreated behind the iron curtain in
1949 had, however, sent letters to their relatives. The village
president, who provided these statistics, was obviously well in-
formed on these matters and clearly believed that a major part
of his duties was to keep a close watch upon leftists or sus-
pected leftists.

166 Here, then, is a village scarcely better off than it was in 1947.
621 In spite of the expenditure of tens of thousands of dollars, de-
433 rived indirectly from American aid – indeed, *because* of such
[669] expenditure – the acute and untenable overcrowding of very
poor land continues; and with it the political tensions of 1946-
49 seethe, just beneath the surface. The only solution for Che-
rasia which seems to make any sense is to remove two thirds or
more of the present population, and find land or work for them
elsewhere. This has not been attempted; official policy has done
just the opposite by placing barriers in the way of migration
from the community.

[464] Unfortunately, Volos, the natural outlet for the surplus popu-
lation of Cherasia, was itself undergoing a first-class economic
crisis in 1956. * The port, which is the economic heart of the

[731] 4. An earthquake which damaged many buildings in Volos rather badly
[653] in 1954 was, under the circumstances, a perverse blessing to many of the
poorer families of the town. Repair and reconstruction got under way
quickly, thanks to a special grant from the national budget (and assisted
by a special American aid appropriation of \$7 million for the purpose).
This gave temporary work to many, but by 1956 this extraordinary source
of employment had dwindled. At the same time, a large textile plant in the
city went on part time, and discharged a large proportion of its working
force, as a result of a general crisis in the Greek textile trade. Consequently,
Volos was, like Cherasia, unusually clean and tidy in 1956, and unusually
depressed.